

CHRONICLES OF HOANG PHU NGOC TUONG AND UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT ORIGINAL CULTURE ROUTS

Le Hai Anh

University of Education, Vietnam National University, Hanoi

Abstract. Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong was born in 1937 in Hue. He started his literature career with poems and novels but gained significant achievements in chronicles. Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong's chronicles are the writer's understandings about original culture routs. What he wrote are understandings about geography, history, biology, sculpture, painting, philosophy, spiritual aspects, cultural belief, etc. in different regions of the country in his chronicles, thus determined the cultural beauty and the writer's talent in chronicles.

Keywords: Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong, chronicles, culture routs, Hue culture.

1. Introduction

Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong was born on September 9th, 1937 in Hue City. He started his literature career with poems and novels but then changed to chronicles. From the very first chronicle *Star on The Phu Van Lau Peak* (1971), he became one of the best chronicle writers of modern Vietnam literature during his 30 years in career. Always keep searching, innovating, keen on writing and interested in adapting diversity culture, Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong has had many unique, interesting and assertive cultural works. He focuses on writing chronicles and notes. Besides, he also writes poems and gossips. Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong expressed a talented, dilettante, lyrical, and political commentary which deeply attract readers. *A Farewell to a river* is also his farewell to readers, to his passionate writing career. His typical chronicles are: *The Star on The Phu Van Lau Peak* (1972), *Many lights of Flame* (1980), *The Will of The Cortaderia Selloana* (chronicle story, 1984), *Who named the river?* (1984), *Trinh Cong Son and The Lya musical instrument of Small Prince* (2005), *The Scented Grass Area* (2007), *A Farewell to a River* (2011), etc..

One of the strong points of chronicles over other types is the cover of many social issues belonging to various aspects. Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong's chronicles enrich the reader's knowledge of the society in many fields such as geography, history, biology, sculpture, painting, philosophy and spiritual aspects, cultural beliefs in different areas all over the country. In all aspects, he attracts the readers by his clear explanations with wide knowledge. His knowledge expressed in chronicles always brings regional culture.

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Contact: Le Hai Anh, e-mail: lehaiansphn@gmail.com

2. Content

Exploiting reality from the point of culture is a very unique and typical way in Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong's writings. He used his mother tongue innovatively to enrich Vietnamese vocabulary. His vocabulary belongs to many lexical aspects and is viewed from different viewpoints such as history, geography, biology, culture, nature, music, painting, design, architecture, philosophy, poems, etc.

Across our country, every region has its own cultural characteristics on the basis of common Vietnamese culture. It is unique in a united diversity. Referring to culture is referring to a combination of traditions, human and lifestyle. And the new and unique elements create regional culture characteristics, which not all of us can perceive.

After researching, we can find over *8000 words and phrases* belonging to geography. It shows that Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong uses a wide range of geographical vocabulary system in his writings. He also expresses his overwhelming love, deep compassion, utmost respect to every land, every geographical name that he visited. Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong has marked an unblended image on every land he visited. With a talented, passionate writing style, the writer has created a pervasive sound to every of his readers.

Thanks to his realistic experience of "a person indulges in pleasure", the writer provides various useful information about weather, regional climate, origin, role, position of rivers, border territory, regional cultures of our country with full of interest. Regional borders of provinces are also clearly marked during his every journey.

Visiting Lang Son province and witnessing Lang Son people and soldiers fighting against Chinese invaders, Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong points out patriotic tradition with glorious feat of arms in history of the land. He wrote: "A thousand years ago, Le Hoan called at Chi Ma to arrange the fighting plan with Tong at the border, brought back a glorious Chi Lang victory, people here built up this temple for commemoration, which now still exists under the name of the mountain. . . I have focused on identifying every hill upon its victory, with my touching emotion as I am seeing every hero" (*Who came back the old land*).

Hue is always the area which is attached with and brought emotions to Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong the most. In daily emotional life of Hue people, the Huong river, Ngu mountain become the symbol of beauty of the land and its spirit. Huong river is seen in the folk-song:

Missing homeland in every trip

Missing the Huong river with fresh breezes, missing Ngu Binh hanged over with moon.

(Folk-song)

Tran Dinh Su saw "historical and cultural stature" of Hue through the chronicle *Who named the river?* by Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong. The poetic, romantic, peaceful beauty of Hue was not only revealed through architectures, temples, mausoleums, at Huong river, Ngu mountain but also rooted from unique characteristics of regional cultures. Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong not only provides readers with more views and knowledge of glorious, wild and poetic beauty of Huong river but also brought back deep understandings which

“cites” Huong river as an innovator who created, kept and preserved a culture for Hue. This characteristic of Hue culture was revealed more clearly in Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong’s chronicles . He writes about the beginning of Hue in the writings about Chau Hoa citadel before, about the people who lived and fought to preserve the national culture during innovation period. Hue in its forming and developing period created unique and unblended culture. “Until now, nursing in its gardens, the strip of land near Huong river from Bach Ho bridge to Thien Mu pagoda still brings in itself the image of an ancient Vietnam urban centre. Hue city was established in 1963, and Kim Long became the famous metropolis of the south in the next 50 years” (*Flowers and Fruits around me*). A combination of folk culture and imperial culture creates a unique color for Hue, which is unblended with any other areas in Vietnam. Along with that are ditty songs and folks, which bring both natural, modern and imposing, luxurious and deep color of imperial music. The image of Hue ladies holding imperial music instruments in their hands, singing attractive and passionate lullabies has been deeply marked in Hue people’s spirit. Along Huong river, songs are sung in such a warm and passionate tongue.

One of the native cultural characteristics of Hue is garden-house. As stated by Pham Phu Phong (2002), “Among many provinces Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong visited and wrote about, Hue is the place he understands most” (*“Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong - the teller of war fairy-tale”*). According to Hue people, a house is always attached with a garden. House and garden are two elements of a lively product which bears both economic and beauty value. An Hien Garden is famous for its diversity of precious trees and flowers such as: pergularia, jasmine, peony flower, climbing rose, gerbera, etc. Before the Nguyen masters built their citadel in Thuan Hoa, people had lived by gardening for a very long time: “generations after generations, they did gardening while reading; gardening nursed a deep and thick cultural lifestyle” (*Flowers and Fruit around me*). Garden-House culture expresses a united lifestyle attached to the nature of Hue people. They respect, love, take care of their trees and garden. Thus, coming to Hue, to Vi Da land, we would be extremely astonished by the overwhelming green color. Trees around houses, especially the straight areca lines in front of red and low roof houses create an unforgettable hallmark when people foot on this ancient imperial land.

The nature in writings of Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong is toponyms stretching over from star anise forest in Lang Son to Ca Mau Cape. What defines his success was his writing about nature, but more than that, he felt and noted that nature became the Mother-Land nurturing people. He felt the cultural beauty of lands, sky, rivers, mountains, beaches, paths, forests, climate, etc. All of those deeply expresses Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong’s concepts about nature. Thus, to him, nature is also culture.

A painting of countryside was adorned by colorful flowers, especially the one attached to Vietnamese customs. In his chronicles, Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong has elevated the beauty of flowers. While in the south, people prefer apricot blossom during New Year, in the north, people use peach blossom to decorate their houses. Coming up to the Northern West provinces, the writer was astonished at glorious, poetic, and native natural scenes. The green fields stretch the white, pink, yellow colors of flowers such as white-dotted blossom, apricot blossom, peach blossom, five-color blossom, etc., revealing

the blended beauty between human and nature. That is a fresh nature with strong and breathtaking beauty. People in the center of Hue had spiritual trend on colour as purple and white. Purple is symbolic colour of Hue culture. And the yellow color of apricot blossom is symbol of the south, expressing the exquisite, riches and wealth.

The characteristic color concept of Hue is purple. The writer explained: “In daily words, the concept “Hue purple” has a very clear origin: warm enough and still bright, it does not call for the sadness like pansy flowers, but a light happiness of spring herbs. It nurses inside a bright, rich but unshowy internal feelings; thus, to Hue women, that purple is both color of their shirts and also a virtue” (*Sad Epic*). Referring to Hue, one cannot ignore the purple “ao dai” and the poetic hat which elevates the charming, lovable beauty of the women here. The purple colour is the characterized color create a poetic and romantic Hue.

Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong also described artistic flowers characterized for human fate. He spends some pages writing about Confederate roses, bee bushes, Flamboyant flower, etc. In chronicle *The Mountain of Illusion*, the writer uses the love story between Adam and Eva to explain the name of this flower. However, his implication is related to philosophy of human life regulations on earth. Like the Confederate roses, the forest flowers that he saw by the river A-pang also had a very short life. He describes them in the same way as the bee bush flowers, but they had a bloody red color. Then he thinks about the sun flower, which only blossoms once then dies. Through these kinds of flower, he shows a fierce vitality, being shining, live in one’s own way: “I have a pearl heart only to live and die once with my own heart”. This was also soldiers’ wish for victory in the war. Everyone has only one life; they live to be shining, to be devoted and to be themselves. And there was a Ca Tu woman named after A-rui flower, a Hue woman named Phuong (Flamboyant flower), a Hanoi woman named Hong, Lan, ect. In the chronicle *Who came back the old land*, Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong described the beauty of the “Chầu” flower in the north-east area. “This is my first time to see the beauty of highlands in season of “Chầu” flower”. The flower is fresh white as just cleaned after the rain with luxuriant blossoms covering all the leaves. It is like Flamboyant flower, like fresh happiness which reveals all itself. It is like the white Cortaderia Selloana which brings a passionate beauty in the Ancient Citadel, the five-colour flowers in Hai Thuy, the red flowers in Khe Trai, (*Recall in a lighting night, Sad Epic*) There are many other kinds of flower referred in his chronicles. Those bring inside the shape and image of incarnations with innermost feelings which imply human beings’ value that not everyone can realize.

Reading *The Mountain of Illusion* by Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong gives us more understandings that the nature in Bach Ma covers a historical period in every tree, herb and every pine-tree. “Nature needs a thousand years to have culture as inner saver, and culture is a precious thing to human. Natural culture of Bach Ma can totally be re-born” (*The Mountain of Illusion*).

Any nation bears its own unique customs and religious characteristic. It defines a culture of a deep history, with a cultural beauty in every ceremony, carnival, living concept and spiritual concept of the nation. One of which, referred to by Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong

in his chronicles, was chewing betel. This custom is still kept until now on New Year, in weddings, funerals, and other occasions. In “ A Thousand years of delta, a red piece of betel”, Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong also referred to this folk culture with his pride of spiritual culture value of the Vietnam people nurtured in a betel piece.

Burying dead people is also a cultural custom of Viet people. This is mentioned in *The will of Cortaderia Selloana*. He wrote: “According to this countryside’s custom, it is necessary to be very careful when doing exhuming and moving tombs not to leave any piece of bone, since it is a misfortune for the dead people in other world to lack his/her bone.” (*The will of Cortaderia Selloana*). This expresses respect, and love of the existing people for their dead ones.

The habits of the Father Thieu’s family in chronicle *Forest of Illicium verum* in Lang Son is also the same as of other families in the northern mountainous highlands. “Families follow their traditions, every son live separate, the house is build one more room next to for him, surrounding the common wide yard”. It is when the son gets married, parents of the bride will offer a spare room for the new couple. They will live and eat separately but still attached to their parents’ house. This, thus, can give independence and self-control for the new couple. The writer Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong had chance to follow the old Kon Lai to go to the forest getting honey. He found a very interesting thing was the old Kon Lai still kept the tradition to create fire from the cave. According to the Ca-Tu people, when they found a tree with bee nest, they would mark that tree as their procession. Besides, the Ca-Tu also had the teeth whetting custom, the upper teeth will be whetted as old tradition (*Life of Forest*). In the Ca-Tu’s legendary mind, the afterworld is not a horrifying hell to dead people’s souls, but is another world inside the earth, where souls live peacefully light is purer due to the earth cover (*The Sad Epic*).

Expressing gratitude towards trees is also a beauty in spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. Especially, through chronicles of Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong, readers know that the Hue also have this custom, and also hang mourning for trees. This hanging mourning impressed and moved readers. “When the garden owner passed away, the old people will hang mourning on the good trees to avoid them from dying, because it is believed that trees also follow people’s mood” (*Flowers and Fruits around me*). And, the Hue people is very respectful of nature; they love nature and they see nature as their intimate friend. They live close to flowers, trees, and herb. Gardening is their big joy, their happiness. Thus, they have the custom to send gratitude to trees. “At the end of the year, people have a small present, some popcorns, bangers, and some yellow and silver papers to cover stumps. This is not to worship, this is just to thank those trees for giving them fruits and flowers during the year” (*Flowers and Fruits around me*). That is a cultural beauty in spiritual life of Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong and the Hue people towards nature.

It is able to say over other areas of the country, Hue is the land to keep family regulations until now. Kings and lords after death were buried at nice places with good Fengsui. Those were ancient, polite and peaceful mausoleums and temples. Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong described: “Blended in the up and down mountains, there exists the thousands-year sleeping kings and lords, being covered inside the quiet pine-tree forest

and the gloomy pride of bulky mausoleums stretching the whole upstream area” (*Who named the river?*)

Ngu Binh mountain is also one of the famous place bearing cultural beauty. Nature and culture here are mixed. To Hue people, “the Ngu Binh is forever the symbol of internal love”. From the outside, “the Ngu Binh is not only the over scenery”, but “it is also a deeply in spiritual life of many Hue generations” because this is “the mountain assigned by the God to witness couples’ vows” (*The Sad Epic*).

On the contrary to swearing is abstaining custom. According to the Hue people, this custom may have started with Hue ladies avoid going to Linh Mu pagoda to say swears for love, since the red –shirt deity of the pagoda will be jealous and punish them with unhappy endings.” (*The Sad Epic*). As recorded by many historical books, The King Tu Duc did not have children so the name of pagoda Thien Mu was changed into Linh Mu to avoid the name of the fairy name, the God name. Thus, the Hue people abstain to go to this pagoda asking for predestined affinity to avoid being punished with no children.

The relationships between human and human, human and nature are also a cultural characteristic in the communication behavior of the Vietnamese. In communication relationships, Vietnamese people are respectful for sentiments, affections and gratitudes, delicate and sensitive. Through his chronicles, Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong shows us the communication behavior culture between human and human, human with natural world with marked national tradition culture.

In every place he visits, the writer knows how to address people in a suitable way according to its regional behavioral culture. In the centre and the south, people call their grandparents as “maternal grandparents” and “paternal grandparents” while Hue people usually use “ôn mẹ” to address their grandparents, “o” for “aunt”. Those addressing ways remain unchanged except the addressing way between husband-wife and parents-children. This behavior is different between regions. For example, in the North, many family call parents by the “cha mẹ”, “bố mẹ”, but some uses “u”, “bu”, “bầm”. Or in both the Centre and the North, people call parents “thầy mẹ”, “thầy me”, “Cậu mợ”, “chú thím”. Parents can call their children by names or by birth order. In the North, the first child is called: “cả”, but in the Centre and the South they call this child “Hai”. Hue people only call people by names. In the Centre, children call their parents “ba mẹ”. Based on his native cultural knowledge, Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong clearly pointed out the levels in family relationships of Vietnamese people and the diversity in the ways for addressing those levels between regions. Understandings of architecture and sculpture are also the strong point in Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong’s chronicles. An ancient tile-roofed house, a moss covered wall with the green of leaves are beautiful pictures that build up the special characteristic of Hue garden-house, where human is blended with nature.

As in the building architecture of Ca Mau, people mainly use the mangrove materials. He confirmed: “The wood of mangrove plays an important part in architecture of a village in the cape land. . . It is possible to say, in Ca Mau Cape land, the mangrove image is a symbol like the bamboo tree in Vietnamese countryside, in their livings as well as in feelings and cultural life” (*The salt water forest*). Housing architecture of people

in Ca Mau is described as follow: “Houses somehow have the same architecture: the big room floored with polish brown wood,. . . Door path of every house is a wide plank bridge hung over a swamp leading to the pier”. They also build house which are “near the boat canal facing to the river, there is nothing in front, only a canvas hung down to cover rain and sunshine” (*The Cape Land*).

Housing architecture of the Central region was described in the chronicle: The red betel piece: “house with new cottage roof, walls by plywood, seeing a long corner path in between the fence line just neatly cut. The only vestige of the old house left is the two bossed pillars, which still exist now. . . in which a couple of parallel sentences were sculptured using the ancient “Thọ” writing style”.

Temples, communal houses, pagodas and worshipping places for ancestor are among architectures that interest Vietnamese people. “The communal house was built firmly as a fortification” (*The Red betel piece*). In the chronicle “Who named the river?”, the readers realize Hue culture by the image of the romantic and poetic Huong river. The Huong river rooted from the headstream down, heard the bell sound from Thien Mu pagoda from the other side, between villages overwhelming with chicken sounds. . .”. His sentences recall a cultural beauty in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people in general and Hue people in particular. Over all, it is “the gloomy pride of bulky mausoleums Stretching over the whole upstream area”, an after death place for kings and lords. Thus, architectural culture helps build up a nation’s culture. Architecture also implies religion; it is built up from the magical space of the Orient with sparkling and illusory beauty, “and the whole European architectural city is sunk in oriental magical space, with nature full of forest spring flowers, summer sunshine, and smoky dew of autumn, where trees and stones are clean as non-affectious, clouds and sound of stream waken up spiritual life of its precursor dream, sort as being forgotten long time ago” (*The mountain of illustration*).

Not only keen on architecture and sculpture, Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong is also interested in the music culture. The writer felt the flow from Hon Chen temple through Hue city, “the Huong river became an actress playing music at night”. The writer considered this river the origin of Hue imperial music, the source of emotion that inspired Nguyen Du to write Kieu Story, “the whole classical music of Hue was born on the surface of this river” (*Who named the river?*). Those sentences are open for readers to recall imperial music, the “Nam Ai, Nam binh lyrics and Mai nhi, Mai day chanties. . . full of feelings of rivers and human:

*Ngu Binh Mountain round in front, crooked at back
An Cuu river muddy in the sun, clear in the rain
Lonely I stand in the middle of the boat
Water beneath, Moon above
Who to give fate, who to share heart?”*

Besides, Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong’s chronicles contain many new discoveries ò diversified cultures of many areas such as Phu Xuan cultural tradition, Hue relics, cuisine culture, garden-house culture, Bai Tho mountain, Ha Long Bay, Van village wine, Sword lake, etc.

3. Conclusion

Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong has saved, experienced his life by grawing and passionate recalls to create chronicles imbued with national character of Vietnam. When approaching culture beauty characters in chronicles by Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong, readers realize a rare talent in this country's chronicle history because he focuses on the cultural values attached with human life, with the unique beauty and character everywhere. Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong's chronicles show deep understandings about the native culture and touches the depth of the national culture.

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